2017

REPORT

HER EXPERIENCE

WE4L Women Empowered for Leadership

Hivos people unlimited

HER WAY: Creating New Connections Through Shared Experiences

On the 6th and 7th of October 2017 over 56 Women's activists from HIVOS and its partners in Jordan, Lebanon, Zambia, Zimbabwe, and Malawi, met at the inaugural "linking and learning: women empowered for leadership conference" at the Meikles Hotel in Harare, Zimbabwe. The conference was held under the auspices of HIVOS' Women Empowered for Leadership (WE4L) program, a 5-year program that HIVOS implements with local partners aimed at promoting activists cooperation and collaboration towards equal participation of women in politics, public administration and civil society.

The linking and learning conference created a platform for building linkages and networks amongst WE4L program countries and participants and critical reflection on the state of effective women's participation in the MENA and Southern Africa regions. What follows is an output of that process, and serves as a précis on the context at the time of the conference which informed participant's interventions, lessons learnt from conference, and best practice on programing that could be adopted and adapted towards effective women's participation in all sectors of society in the five target countries.

" A strong and vibrant democracy is only possible when all levels of government and leadership are fully inclusive of the people they represent. No public or private office is inclusive unless it has the full participation of women."

EMMA KALIYA , CHAIRPERSON SADC GENDER PROTOCOL ALLIANCE
KEYNOTE SPEECH, INAUGURAL LINKING AND LEARNING CONFERENCE, 2017

"When women and girls are not integrated—as both beneficiary and shaper—the global community loses out on skills, ideas and perspectives that are critical for addressing global challenges and harnessing new opportunities ."

KLAUS SCHWAB WORLD ECONOMIC FORUM FOUNDER,
PREFACE TO THE2017 GLOBAL GENDER GAP REPORT

With over 50% of the world's population as women,, the truth of Kaliya and Schwab's words ought to be self-evident. However, the reality is that optimum progress towards gender parity is yet to be achieved, and generally stands at a global average of 68% leaving a 32% gap to be filled. For women's political participation, the gap is more significant at 77%, having only covered 33% towards parity. Thus, women continue to be drastically underrepresented in political leadership positions around the world, with Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) and the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) amongst the regions where the gender gaps are starkest. According to the Global

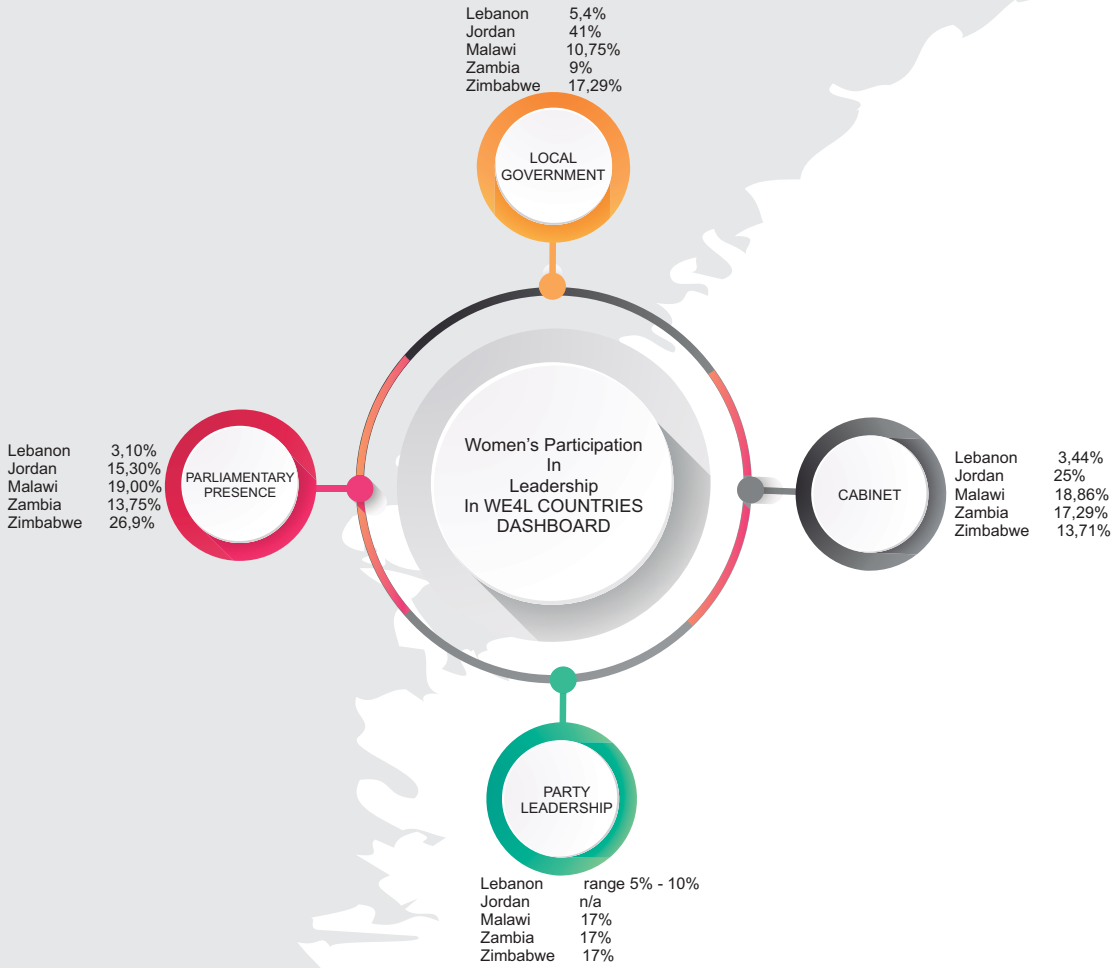
Gender Gap Report for 2017, which takes encompasses political empowerment, economic participation and opportunity, Educational attainment, and Health and survival, Sub Saharan Africa is at least 32 percentage points from gender parity, with the MENA region standing at a stark 40 percentage points away from parity.

The state of women's participation and leadership has seen some gradual improvements over time, but a number of steep challenges have limited progress. Amongst these are discriminatory laws, practices, attitudes, and stereotypes; low levels of education; lack of access to health care; and the disproportionate effect of poverty on women. Over time, attempts at dealing with these challenges have manifested through global, continental, and national commitments on gender parity and women's empowerment politically and economically. At a global level, these include inter alia, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) of 1979, the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action of 1995, together with other commitments and targets like the UN Security Council Resolution 1325, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG's), especially goal number five (5) on gender equality and empowerment.

At the regional level, Africa has the Maputo Protocol of 2003, which affirms women's rights and is binding on member states, requiring them to address laws, policies and culture to realize women's rights and prohibit all forms of violence against women. Additionally, Southern Africa- home to Zim, Zambia and Malawi, three of the country parties to the WE4L program - also has the SADC Protocol on Gender and Development of 2008 with specific targets including 50/50 representation of women and men. The SADC Gender Protocol Barometer, to which all Southern African WE4L partners contribute, is an assessment mechanism which tracks the status of gender equality across SADC's 15 member states, established by the SADC Gender Protocol Alliance in 2009, shows that women's representation averages 24.47 % in Parliament, 24.23% in local councils, and 21.53 in Cabinets. Women are also poorly represented in political party leadership at an average of 29.5%.

In the MENA region, whilst no unifying regional protocols exist, most countries are signatories to CEDAW albeit with reservations, and also ascribe to the SDGs. In 2015 the league of Arab States in partnership with UN Women developed a Regional Action Plan for Women, Peace and Security, following a review of Security Council resolution 1325. International agencies like the World Bank have also put in place frameworks to aid the increased participation of women at national and programmatic levels through initiatives like the MENA Regional Gender Action Plan, which aims to structurally address gender inequality. As a corollary, speaking in Beirut, Lebanon on International Women's Day, Executive Secretary for the UN Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) Rima Khalaf argued that while women could be celebrated on this day for their many achievements in sciences, literature and the arts, their primary achievement was in the art of survival. Despite these remarkable and steady strides towards structural solutions to dealing with women's empowerment, the struggle continues as figure 1 shows.

Figure 1:Women's Participation in Leadership in WE4L Target Countries



The above statistics show that while women are present in leadership roles in politics, the four countries highlighted are still behind the 30% target set in the 1995 Beijing Platform for Action, let alone the 50-50 targets espoused in the SADC Protocol on Gender and Development. According to the Inter-Parliamentary Union, on this performance SADC ranks third behind the Americas and Nordic Countries, the MENA region ranks last globally, in women's representation at parliamentary level. The SADC Gender Protocol Barometer for 2017 notes that "Special measures" like quotas and the adoption of proportional representation and mixed electoral systems, remain the most effective mechanisms for increasing women's representation in political leadership from local to national levels of governance. This assertion is supported by evidence showing that the best-performing country in the sub region, South Africa with over 40% representation across all levels of government, and the best performing country in the world Rwanda with 64% plus across the board, have proportional representation systems supported by various affirmative action laws and policies. Zimbabwe, with the highest representation of the WE4L countries at parliamentary level, has a reserved quota of 60 out of 270 seats for women in the National Assembly